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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON KAZAKHSTAN'S OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP BID

REF: STATE 139361

Classified By: POLCOUNS TED ANDREWS. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Poloff met with Marc Michielsen, Policy Director for the MFA's OSCE Chairmanship Unit, to relay reftel points on Kazakhstan's 2009 OSCE Chairmanship bid. Michielsen said Belgium planned to "take the temperature" of EU nations on Kazakhstan's bid over the next couple of months. As CiO, Belgium was looking for a consensus among EU countries, with the goal to reach a decision on Kazakhstan "without too much collateral damage and no embarrassment to the Kazakh government." For now, Belgium would maintain a "wait and see" mode, watching closely the responses from other EU capitals to the U.S. demarche. Noting points raised in reftel, poloff urged him to join us in securing the voluntary postponement of the Kazakh candidacy. Michielsen was noncommittal.

¶2. (C) Michielsen felt support was increasing for Kazakhstan's bid. He cited "persuasive" arguments made by Jan Kubis, Slovak Foreign Minister and EU Special Representative for Central Asia, in a recent OSCE committee meeting, where Kubis made the case that a failed bid could send Kazakhstan "in the wrong direction."

¶3. (C) Michielsen said President Nazarbayev planned to visit Brussels in early December, immediately before the OSCE Ministerial, for a bilateral meeting with the Belgians and meetings with EU officials. He suspected that its 2009 bid would be a focus of discussions, although, according to Michielsen, "the December Ministerial will not center on this issue."

¶4. (C) Comment: In past conversations with U.S. officials, the Belgians have acknowledged the challenges represented by Kazakhstan's quest for the 2009 OSCE Chairmanship, concurring that a postponement of its bid may be a better option until more progress has been made on democracy and rule of law issues. As CiO, however, and with what they view as "momentum building in favor of Kazakhstan's bid," the Belgians will focus on the need to build a consensus on Kazakhstan, with the "EU attitude" an important factor.

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